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SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR (MCISAAC), DRL/PHD (GILBRIDE)

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SUBJECT: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND POLICE ABUSE CENTERS: HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

REF: STATE 279217

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Poloff and DRL Karen Gilbride called on human rights partners in Santo Domingo and Bani on October 20-21. In an effort to emphasize Embassy concerns with recent upsurges in domestic violence and continuing human rights abuses by the National Police, Poloff and DRL officer Karen Gilbride met with local counterparts, such as the Director of an Anti-Domestic Violence Center, the Secretary of Women, and Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) grantees selected to create police abuse prevention offices (reftel). Grantees were enthusiastically optimistic about establishing a database to catalogue complaints against police; they considered it a long overdue mechanism to help address human rights abuses. Implementing partners include an unconventional mix of two respected human rights NGOs and the Dominican Government's Institute of Dignity and Humanity (IDIH), administrated by a Police General who is also a former Director of Prisons. However, sustaining USG-funded projects (past and present) will require pressuring the GODR to fulfill its commitment. Engagement by grantees is evident, but the GODR as a whole must back up its human rights responsibilities to the citizenry with action. End Summary.

ANTI-DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CENTER LACKS RESOURCES

2. (U) On October 20 DRL officer Karen Gilbride, poloff and NAS program assistant traveled to Bani, a city in the southwestern province of San Cristobal, to meet with Bibiana Nunez, director of an Anti-Domestic Violence Center that was partially funded by NAS. Director Nunez expressed frustration with the National Police (PN), the Attorney General's office and the Secretariat of Women for not fully implementing their contributions outlined in a Letter of Agreement (LOA) signed in 2002. (Note: In September poloff and NAS program assistant met with Nunez, who at that time was preparing to avoid eviction from the original facility because the Secretariat of Women had not paid rent. End Note.) Now comfortably re-located in a bigger facility, the Center continues to confront critical staff shortages and lack of operational support, including but not limited to: lawyers, a psychologist and a social worker that the Secretariat of Women agreed to provide, more Police

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protection, and a medical technologist and Internet connection to be provided by the Attorney General.

3. (U) During the October 20 meeting with Director Nunez, Gilbride and Emboffs witnessed an interview of a family victimized by domestic violence and suspected sexual abuse of minors. There were more than 50 men, women and children scattered inside and outside of the building, all waiting to talk with Ms. Nunez while she juggled the sensitive family interview, numerous phone calls and impatient clients. Except for two police officers, a volunteer handyman and a part-time community worker, there was nobody present to help Ms. Nunez maintain order. She informed us that Mondays were typically busy, because domestic violence is most likely to occur on weekends. She also said that her Center receives anywhere from 20-30 physical abuse cases monthly; local newspapers have reported that 110 women have been killed to date locally in crimes of passion, compared with 119 for all of 2002. Ms. Nunez' concerns included: lack of training for police officers assigned to the Center, lack of a psychologist, lack of a social worker, lack of a physician to evaluate sexual abuse victims, and general lack of support for domestic violence survivors. Nunez praised USG assistance and noted that the Embassy was the only partner that had fully implemented its share of the LOA.

GRANTEES COMMITTED BUT NEED LOGISTICAL ADVICE

4. (U) Gilbride and Emboffs met with the Institute of Dignity and Humanity (IDIH) Director General Manuel Perez Sanchez;

Vielka Polanco, director of the Santo Domingo Human Rights Institute; Virgilio Almanzar, chairperson of the Dominican Human Rights Committee, a technical assistant from Hifab International (a Swedish consulting firm) and other IDIH staff to discuss implementation of the HRDF grant to create Police Abuse Prevention Offices. The implementing partners represent an unusual mix of the PN and NGOs working together to acknowledge human rights problems in the police ranks*-a project the partners said may prove to be controversial if not dangerous in the long run.

15. (U) IDIH, set up by the Mejia administration in 2001, already provides basic human rights courses to sensitize members of the PN; 9,000 PN personnel have received this training. These courses are not mandatory, but General Perez Sanchez said he wants to change that culture. He told us that this pilot project is critical to ultimately reducing extrajudicial killings and police harassment. Almanzar is a respected activist who has followed human rights cases for more than 20 years. As the chairperson of the Dominican Human Rights Committee, he is quoted frequently in local press concerning abuses. Even so, he lacks the appropriate operational resources necessary to run his NGO efficiently. The HRDF grant is intended to give him the support he needs to further his objectives. Also involved is Vielka Polanco, a lawyer who has worked at the Santo Domingo Human Rights Institute (IDHSD) since 1999. Polanco has legal expertise and experience from working with academia on human rights curricula.

16. (SBU) The discussion with implementing partners revealed unresolved logistical issues. Gilbride raised concerns about victims, protection from disgruntled accused police officers, which the partners echoed. General Perez Sanchez noted that the Law Against Domestic Violence has a provision for witness protection that could be applied in such instances. Gilbride also questioned to what extent the Police Abuse Prevention Offices should be publicized, considering a likely increase in demand for services that the offices would be ill equipped to handle. The partners agreed that too much publicity too soon could adversely affect the project. Gilbride and Poloff agreed to provide partners a list of recommended next steps for their comment before money is disbursed.

DESTACAMENTO IN BANI: THE BLAME GAME

17. (SBU) Secretary of Women Yadira Henriquez discussed with Poloff and McBride her concerns with the Bani anti-domestic violence center, locally referred to as the &destacamento8 (&post8 or &station8). Secretary Henriquez asserted that increasing domestic violence alarmed the Women's Secretariat and that the Bani destacamento had the Secretariat's full support. When asked about the lack of agreed upon personnel in Bani, Henriquez responded that though the Secretariat's budget was minimal, a lawyer had been provided and a psychologist would be assigned soon. She blamed the National Office for Personnel Administration (ONAP) for not approving personnel for Bani that the Women's Secretariat had recommended. (Note: ONAP is an office within the executive branch responsible for protecting civil servants, rights. End Note.) She said that it is more appropriate for the PN to fund most of these positions, because destacamentos countryside fall under police jurisdiction. Henriquez lamented, &The Women's Secretariat is not a traditionally respected institution like other ministries.8

18. (U) In a separate meeting on October 23, Attorney General Victor Céspedes told Poloffs that he is also concerned with domestic violence problems. As for the uninstalled Internet connection at the destacamento in Bani, he seemed not to recall offering that service. He emphasized that Director Nunez needs to put all requests in writing and undertook to honor them. (Note: Emboffs will raise this issue again in a follow-up courtesy call with the police chief, who was out of the country at the time of Gilbride's visit. End Note.)

COMMENT

16. (SBU) Promoting human rights is and will continue to be a key Mission objective. The HRDF grant money is timely, given local press reports of an increase in extrajudicial killings this year. Implementing partners appear eager to get to work, and the logistical details should not be difficult to resolve with time. The Attorney General himself addressed the perceived problem of an increasingly violent Dominican society in a press story a few weeks ago. The upsurge in domestic violence can probably be attributed in part to a worsening economy and high unemployment, currently estimated at more than 16 per cent. Budget constraints might also explain why the National Police, Attorney General and Secretariat of Women have been unable to dedicate more

resources to the anti-domestic violence centers. It remains to be seen whether the lack of money is a cover for a lack of political will.
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